

OBITUARY

Professor Peter (Pete) de Villiers Booyesen

Pete was one of the Eastern Cape contingent of Grassland Scientists who graduated in the old Pasture Management and Soil Conservation (PMSC) under Professor J D Scott. He commenced his degree programme in 1949, having matriculated at Kingswood College in Grahamstown. Having completed his BSc Agric in 1953, he proceeded immediately to the MSc Agric, which he was awarded *cum laude* in 1955. At this point he was appointed to the staff of the Department in place of Professor Pine Pienaar, who had taken up an appointment in Pretoria.

In 1960 he took up a Departmental bursary which allowed him to attend the Berkley campus of the University of California, where he was awarded the PhD. He later spent a years' sabbatical in Missouri. Each time he returned from these trips he was promoted - first to a Senior Lectureship, and after the Missouri excursion, to the Associate Professorship. He was appointed Head of the Department at the time of Professor Scott's retirement in 1973.

Of particular interest to the Grassland Science community is his pioneering role,

together with Professor Scott and others, in the establishment of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa, which held its first congress in Pietermaritzburg in 1966. He was elected President of the Society in 1970 and was subsequently elected an Honorary Member of the Society.

In 1977 he moved out of Grassland Science and into University administration, first as the Vice-Principal of the Durban branch of the University of Natal, and in 1983 as Principal of the University. Here he remained until his retirement in 1991.

Pete was involved in numerous activities in addition to his role in academic and administrative matters at the University, and in particular in matters related to rugby and sports administration. He played on the wing for Natal. He was at various times President of the Maritzburg University Rugby Club, the Maritzburg University Sports Union, the Maritzburg Rugby Sub-Union and the Natal Rugby Union and served on the SA Rugby Board. He served as a member of the Natal selection committee.

Grassroots and the GSSA Council would like to thank Prof Neil Tainton for writing this dedication at such short notice. Our thoughts are with Prof Booyesen's family and friends during this difficult time.

Has the Grassland Society still a role to play in Southern Africa?

MESSAGE FROM THE PAST PRESIDENT

*Summary of the Presidential address by Prof Klaus Kellner
28 July 2003 GSSA AGM at IRC/GSSA Congress in Durban*

A **society** can be defined as a number of persons united for the promotion of a common purpose by means of meetings, publications and other activities. A **scientific society**, however, can be defined as a body of persons that are eminently learned or skillful of agreeing with the rules, principles or methods of science. For nearly 30 years, since 1966, the Grassland Society of Southern Africa (GSSA) has been trying to live up to these obligations by making meaningful contributions to policies, land use practices and environmental issues to advance the science and practice of

sustainable use of rangelands and pastures for the social and economic well-being of all people in Southern Africa. The GSSA is a professional society with an interdisciplinary group of scientists and practitioners working in a collaborative way amongst themselves and with other institutions, organizations, agencies and individuals with a common goal in varied resources of rangeland and pasture conservation and management. Members of the GSSA include a wide variety of stakeholders of different service provider and resource consumer organizations in planning, development, education, training

and management. These include academics, scientists, agricultural and environmental officers, farmers, students and any other persons interested in range and forage studies.

Over the years, members of the GSSA have played a major role in the promotion of science and technology of rangeland production and especially the creation of opportunities for different stakeholders with regard to the collection and dissemination of knowledge and information, both nationally and internationally. This has been accomplished through the congresses and publications offered by the GSSA over many years. Through its dedicated members, highly respected scientists and professional objectivity, the GSSA has played a major role in not only promoting the grass and forage science discipline, but also to get a better understanding of the sustainable production and management of these resources. The question however arises, has the GSSA really kept up with the changes that have taken place, including the new challenges that face this discipline over the last three to five years? Research in range and forage science has become more broadly based and inter-disciplinary in which not only the biophysical factors, but also links to the social and economic concerns have to be created. Is the GSSA really demonstrating progress in achieving multi-disciplinary teams working together towards a well defined problem, needs or opportunity, identified and prioritized by the communities working with researchers, extension, and other resource and consumer representatives? If one wants to take the objective and mission of the society into consideration, namely to advance the science and practice *"for the social and economic well-being of all people in Southern Africa"*, I am not so sure if we are really keeping up to these challenges that are facing us on a continued basis. This leads to the second important objective of the GSSA, namely to make valuable contributions towards **policy issues** in South- and Southern Africa. Does the GSSA as a scientific society contribute to policy matters in South Africa?

Although these are very long standing

objectives of the GSSA, have we really fulfilled or lived up to these challenges over the last few years? These are the issues that are becoming more and more important for a society such as the GSSA. **Yes**, members of the GSSA are engaged in farmer's days and special interest group discussions and members are represented on committees and panels for National and Provincial Government and other institutions, and **yes**, we are taking note of policy documentation, **but** are we really listening to the new challenges and are we adjusting our actions accordingly? When last have you announced at one of your committee meetings that you are a GSSA member and that you are proud of it? When last have farmer associations or community groups approached the GSSA to research or investigate important aspects regarding the objectives our Society stands for? When last has the GSSA made an impact and had their voices heard regarding new policy, e.g. the new Biodiversity Bill or the revised Conservation of Agricultural Resources CARA, Act No. 43 of 1983? Have we all become too busy in our own struggle of survival?

Everyone is aware that range and pasture scientists, who were previously involved in the formal governmental sector, as well as many academic and training institutions, who are often regarded as the main feeding ground of the GSSA, has decreased considerably. Many of these dedicated members and long standing supporters of the GSSA have either left the discipline to seek more profitable income sources, are retired, or are showing less and less interest in the GSSA as a discipline. **The dwindling membership, as well as often passive and less dedicated actions or contributions by many GSSA members, has put a tremendous pressure, not only on the existence, but also the management of the GSSA as a whole.** It is not very encouraging if one looks at the last issue of July 2003 of the *"Grassroots"* newsletter, where 7 of the 10 so called sub-regions have not presented any news or activities of the GSSA in their region. I am sure that many activities have been taking place in these regions regarding range and forage science, but have we considered for one moment to mention that

we are part of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa and that we are proud of being part of this "team" of professionals? The GSSA should not only become important when it comes to the annual congress, or when the next issue of the Journal or Grassroots newsletter has been received, or the CV has to be updated.

I think that members of the GSSA have a multitude of skills and knowledge and have made marked contributions, nationally and internationally, through their inputs at congresses, workshops, in books and other publications and by the participation at many forums. The answer to the question made in the title of this presentation is, therefore, not so bleak and negative as it seems. I believe that through all the activities and inputs made by so many of our present and past scientists and land managers, who have become specialists in their field and have made a great impact in the research and development fraternity in Southern Africa, (take for example the use of fire in rangeland management, the control of invasive species or the sustainable management of both the dry and moist grasslands and savannas for livestock and game production in southern Africa, or the development of new cultivars for improved cultivated pastures), that we as members of the GSSA can still make a valuable contribution in the diverse and fast changing country of South Africa. As

specialists or even generalists in the particular fields, we can form an important link in the collaborative and multi-disciplinary interactions between the range and forage disciplines and the social, economic and policy arena in Southern Africa. This includes the liaison and closer collaboration with other societies and associations in South Africa.

It is however important that we put on the "cap" of the GSSA more often, be proud of our Society and promote the objectives of the Society in all our actions and activities.

I want to challenge current and future GSSA members to prove to me, where in the world they would get better value for their money when paying a minimal subscription fee of R225 for all the activities and items that are offered by the GSSA, such as a scientific journal with a high standard of scientific publications, an interesting and very informative newsletter, a well organized annual scientific congress, as well as all the communication and collaboration between different stakeholders that is being created by the GSSA activities. I want to thank all those members who have contributed so greatly to the GSSA and without any remuneration have kept the GSSA still "ticking". I am still proud to be a member of one of the oldest societies in Southern Africa.

HAVE YOU REGISTERED YET?

**The Joint Congress 39 of the
Grassland Society of Southern Africa
and the South African Society for Animal Science
will be held at Goudini Spa, near Stellenbosch,
from 28 June to 1 July 2004.**

**For more information please visit our website, www.gssa.co.za,
or contact Annelene Swanepoel**

**tel: (021) 808-5321, fax (021) 808-5331
or e-mail aneldavh@elsenburg.com.**